



LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBROIDING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,

AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF

THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My dear Scyllah:

SINCE you assure me that I did not say a word too much about the Great Pyramid in my last communication, and repudiate the necessity of "putting a trimming" to such subjects to render them agreeable to you (in fact, you seem almost disposed to give me one for the supposition), I shall add to those particulars a sketch of the entrance to the Pyramid (fig. 11), which is formed on the north face, and is on the level of the 15th step from the foundation, about 47 feet from the ground. I do this merely to draw your attention to the shape of the arch, if it may be called so, by which the weight above is thrown off the opening. It consists simply of inclined stones leaning one against the other, forming a triangle,—an arch of straight sides,—and if you turn back to the small section in my last letter (fig. 7) you will see that the "King's Chamber" is covered in a similar way. I am desirous to show you the coincidences in the architecture of various nations,—the connection and progress, in fact, which are traceable in architecture from the first to the last,—and we shall see by-and-by the recurrence of this triangular arch in the early works of other peoples.



FIG. 11.—ENTRANCE TO PYRAMID.

And what is that sculptured mass at the foot of the pyramid? It is *The Sphinx*, which has there kept watch some thousands of years. This extraordinary monument was 125 feet long; the legs extended 50 feet. There was a temple between the legs, and another in the paw, the whole sculptured out of the living rock. The history of it is lost in obscurity. Some have attributed it to Cheops, and expect that his tomb might be found beneath it; others to Thothmes III. at the date of the Exodus. A subterranean communication between the sphinx and the pyramid has been

talked of, but the whole is matter of speculation. The sand has been cleared away from a portion of the figure, but much of it is still buried.

I may remind you here, that the sand has played a preservative part in Egypt, and has saved for future investigators much that would otherwise have disappeared,—like the white-wash in mediæval works, as we shall see hereafter,—if your patience last long enough. Miss Martineau says, in her "Eastern Life,"—"If I were to have the choice of a fairy gift, it should be like none of the many things I fixed upon in my childhood, in readiness for such occasions. It would be for a great winnowing fan, such as would, without injury to human eyes and lungs, blow away the sand which buries the monuments of Egypt. What a scene would be laid open to them! One statue and sarcophagus, brought from Memphis, was buried 130 feet below the mound surface. Who knows but that the greater part of old Memphis, and of other glorious cities, lies almost unharmed under the sand! Who can say what armies of sphinxes, what sentinels of colossi might start up on the banks of the river, or come forth from the hill sides of the interior, when the cloud of sand has been wafted away!"

All will be discovered in good time: we are not yet ready for it: it is desirable we should be farther advanced in our power of interpretation before the sand be wholly blown away. But, in truth, it will need a high wind to do it, begin when it may.

Amongst the colossal works executed by the Egyptians, the Labyrinth seems to have been one of the most extraordinary. Herodotus says the pyramids were inferior to it, and that it surpassed both in workmanship and expense all the works of Greece. It contained 1,500 apartments above-ground, and as many below. (Euterpe.) Those above-ground he saw; and pronounced them among the greatest efforts of industry and art. "The ceilings and walls," he says, "were all of marble, the latter richly adorned with the finest sculpture; and around each court were numerous pillars of the same material, highly polished." It is supposed to have been a sepulchre. Strabo describes winding passages in it so artfully contrived that it was impossible to enter any one of the palaces, or to leave it when entered, without a guide: and recent discoveries tend to prove the general correctness of the accounts. As Byron says,—

"So much for monuments that have forgotten
Their very records."

It is in Thebes, the hundred-gated,—the city of giants, as it has been termed,—that we find the most striking and genuine specimens of Egyptian art. All travellers concur in stating, that

the appearance of the extraordinary assemblage of ruins here found exceeds the power of description; and though it may not be literally the fact (as stated by Demos), that the French army, on first getting sight of the mysterious piles, halted of their own accord, and with one spontaneous movement clapped their hands,—the story only gives a feeble notion of the effect produced on all who approach the spot.

Amongst the principal ruins must be mentioned Luxor and Carnak, of which you have seen numerous views. The entrance to the temple of Luxor is through a propylon or gateway (which is a distinguishing feature in Egyptian architecture) 200 feet wide, and even at this time nearly 60 feet high above the present level. Before it stood two fine obelisks of red granite covered with hieroglyphics, one of which is now, as you know, in the beautiful *Place de la Concorde*, in Paris. At the northern end it was connected with one of the temples at Carnak by an avenue more than a mile in length, lined with sphinxes, which may serve to give some idea of the scale of magnificence which prevailed.

The great temple at Carnak is of enormous size: the gateway is 360 feet long and 145 feet high. It has a hall with 130 pillars 11 feet in diameter, which occupies an area of 57,629 square feet! It requires consideration and comparison to enable us to comprehend the vastness of these structures: it may assist you if I say that this is nearly four times the area of Westminster Hall: one of the stones in the temple is 41 feet long. The propylon in front of an Egyptian temple consists of two distinct pyramidal moles connected by a doorway formed between them. The term "hundred-gated" probably referred to these propyles rather than to gates in the city-wall.

The propyleum of the temple at Edfou is altogether 226 feet wide, and 114 feet high, covered with boldly sculptured figures. Its mass and strength are so enormous, so disproportioned to its purpose, that we can hardly avoid considering it an abuse of solidity. Still as this error, if it be one, has been the means of preserving it for our study, it would be ungrateful to condemn it.

The temple is now the site of an Arab settlement (like many other of the ruined buildings there), and is plastered over with huts, which appear as swallows' nests against a rock, or, as Hope remarks, "beasts of prey on the carcase of a giant."

"For time hath not rebuilt them, but appeared
Barbaric dwellings on their shattered site,
Which only make more mourned and more endear'd
The few last rays of their far-scatter'd light,
And the crush'd relics of their vanish'd might."

One of the peculiarities of Egyptian architecture which I would have you notice is the large concave cornice which crowns the temples and gateways. Its effect in a bright light is very striking. The bold reed-like member at the angles of all their buildings is another characteristic, and would seem to have its type in the early hut, where perpendicular and horizontal canes, bound together, formed the frame work. Diodorus Siculus, indeed, says that some of the earliest dwellings of the Egyptians were formed of reeds and canes. In the view of the Temple of Dendera which accompanied my last communication, both these features will be seen. You may notice them, too, in the front of the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, one of the few attempts, fortunately, to put up imitations of Egyptian architecture in London.

At the end of the Egyptian gallery, in the British Museum, we have an example of a common form of columns in Egypt, and which would seem to have had its origin in the representation in stone of the shape taken by a bundle of reeds tied together at a short distance from the top, and acted on by a superincumbent weight. Fig. 12, is a sketch of it. I have also introduced a sketch of the often-quoted grotto or tomb at Beni-Hasean (Fig. 13), supposed to be as old as the reign of Senosertis. I shall not point out now its likeness to the Doric of the Greeks, not perfected by them till many centuries after this grotto was excavated, as this will be more

* No. IV. see pp. 100, 123, and 180.